



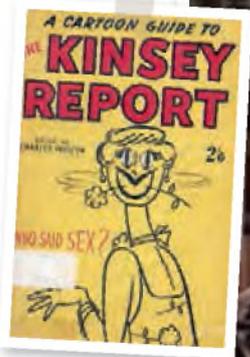
ONE TREASURE HOUSING MANY MORE

Diane Horrigan counts antique birthing chairs and a 16th century anatomical atlas amongst the items in her care and the building housing these wonders as a treasure.

The Frank Forster Library at The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) is located in East Melbourne, Victoria. The buildings of East Melbourne are a mixture of grand houses of the gold rush era and workmen's cottages. Bluestone cobbled laneways and cast ironwork are well known architectural features of this area. College House consists of two buildings which have had extensive interior renovations and extensions to accommodate the growing organization of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), including the library.

The library forms part of an extension wing that was added to the rear of College House in 1988. Lined in jarrah wood, it features matching jarrah furniture designed by a local Victorian cabinet maker who specializes in antique restoration. The furniture includes a library ladder, which is used to reach the top shelves of the library (fear of heights is not an option with this job).

The original library of the College was established in 1954 with donations of 20 rare antiquarian books from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in London. Then Dr Frank Forster, a Victorian obstetrician who had a lifelong passion for collecting in medical history,



A treasure of a library: the jarrah-lined walls of the RANZCOG collection



George Spratt's Obstetrics Tables

offered his extensive private collection of books, journals, pamphlets, instruments, personal papers and prints to the College in 1987. Dr Forster was very active in the area of history of medicine and was well known as a medical historian in Australia and overseas. After he passed away in 1995, the library was officially named the Frank Forster Library in his memory.

The Frank Forster Library is an historical library with collection strengths in the fields of obstetrics, gynaecology, women's health, sex education, infant welfare and birth control. The library includes both a general collection and a rare book collection holding works from Australia, New Zealand and overseas. The rare book collection, housed with the College Archives in a special temperature-controlled room, contains many rare antiquarian books, the oldest being a 16th century pre-Vesalian anatomical atlas by Charles Estienne, considered to be one of the finest anatomical works of that time.

As well as rare books and contemporary histories, the library also holds a large collection of ephemeral materials. The strength of this area of the collection is its historical data, including statistics on maternal and newborn mortality, maternal and infant welfare information dating back to the early 1920s.

'Flap books' -or what we now know as 'pop-up books' - are amongst the most popular items in the collection. The *Obstetric Tables* published in 1837 by George Spratt is one example, having illustrations with lift-up sections or flaps.

The library forms part of the Historical Collections section, which includes the Museum, Archives and College Collection of Decorative Arts, whose collections are important in their own right. Paintings, sculptures, antique birthing chairs, obstetric and gynaecological instruments and operating tables are displayed around College House, with smaller displays housed in glass cases. The library is used to host many College functions – social gatherings, interviews, meetings, examinations and as a backdrop for official portraits.

The library is open to members, Fellows (both active and retired) and Friends of the College. Researchers and members of the public are welcome by appointment.

The Frank Forster Library is one of the finest obstetrical and gynaecological collections in the world. Some items are unique and not available elsewhere in Australia or even the rest of the world.

Diane Horrigan

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